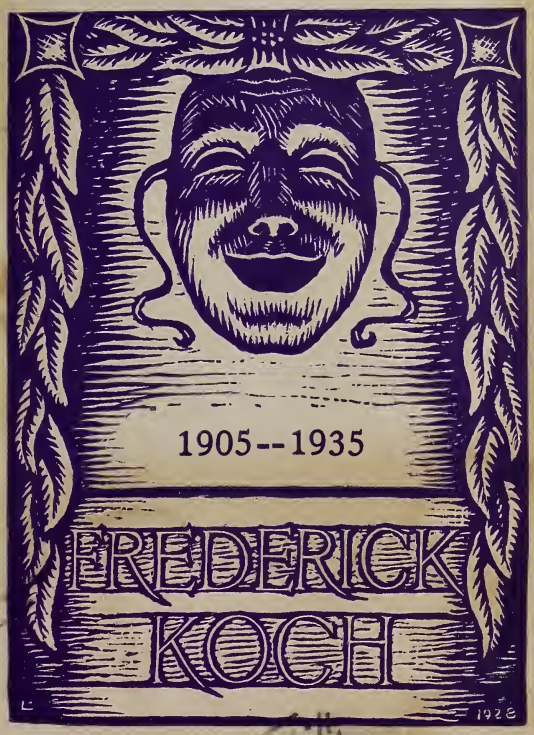
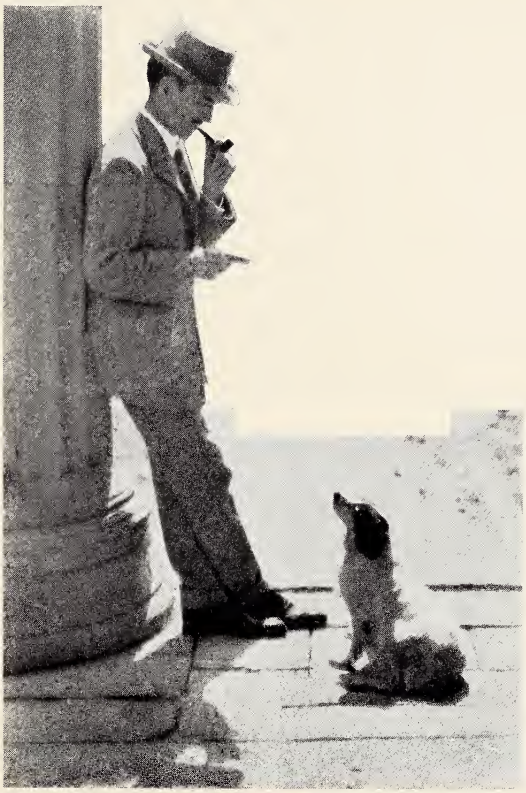
Thirtieth Anniversary of Folk Playmaking



The Carolina Play-Book

Special Feature Edition, edited by Samuel Selden,
Associate Director of the Carolina Playmakers

Thirty Years of Trail-Blazing In American Drama 1905-1935



"Proff" and his Dog, 1927

FREDERICK HENRY KOCH

Founder of The Dakota Playmakers and The Carolina Playmakers

ANNIVERSARY NUMBER

Special Feature Edition, edited by Samuel Selden,
Associate Director of The Carolina Playmakers

¶ FOREST THEATRE PRODUCTIONS of The Carolina Playmakers. *(Opposite page, above)* The setting for *Hamlet*, May 25 and 27, 1935. *(Left)* Professor Koch as PETRUCHIO in *The Taming of the Shrew*, October 15, 1923; *(Right)* as MERCUTIO in *Romeo and Juliet*, May 16 and 17, 1930. ¶ *(Above)* The duel between HAMLET and LAERTES in Act V of *Hamlet*. *(Below)* Professor Koch as *Hamlet*. The setting for *Hamlet* was designed by Samuel Selden. Professor Selden also directed the play. The costumes are by Ora Mae Davis. The photographs are by Wootten-Moulton.

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¶ *(Frontispiece)* THE DIRECTOR OF THE PLAYMAKERS on the portico of The Playmakers Theatre with his pipe and dog, "Dixie." Dixie was The Playmakers' mascot and regularly attended "Proff's" classes, rehearsals, and doctor's examinations. She had the dictinction of being the only dog with a Ph.D. degree (1926) and honorary membership in Actors Equity Association (1928). Her picture was published in *The Theatre Magazine.* When she died the Associated Press carried her story around the world—from New York to Paris and Shanghai—in the Paris (France) edition of *The New York Herald* (January 27, 1931) and in the (Shanghai) *China Daily News.* And the Actors Equity Association periodical, *Equity* (February, 1931), carried a double-column article, "Dr. Dixie Is With Us No More."

¶ *(Left)* PROFESSOR KOCH directing The Dakota Playmakers' production of *Shakespeare the Playmaker,* an original tercentenary masque written by students of the University of North Dakota and presented in The Bankside Theatre on the campus of the University June 12 and 13, 1916. ¶ *(Right)* PROFESSOR KOCH and his son, Billy, at the stage entrance of the Municipal Auditorium in St. Louis, Missouri, May 1, 1934. A tintype snapshot taken on the occasion of The Carolina Playmakers' performances of four of their *Carolina Folk-Plays* at the First National Folk Festival. Billy is the youngest of "Proff's" four sons, all of whom have acted on tour with The Playmakers.

THE CAROLINA PLAY-BOOK

of The Carolina Playmakers and The Carolina Dramatic Association

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To
F.H.K.

The Sower of Dreams

Across an age of grim commercial greed
He shyly stamps, conversing with the night,
His youthful eyes with ancient dreams alight,
And clasped within one hand are golden seed!
The other holding close a slender reed
He dares not raise and sound with wind-swept might,
Lest shaggy music bursting sudden... white...
Allure his soul and blind his eyes to need.

But casting here and there for fertile ground—
The mute reed held neglected in his hand,
His old-young eyes evasively aglow—
He sows the precious seed and hears a sound
Of tiny waking songs throughout the land.
Then pipes to them persuasively—and low.

Joy Kime Benton

Editor's Note: *Joy Kime Benton was a student in Professor Koch's playwriting course at the University of North Carolina in the Summer Session of 1923.* The Sower of Dreams *was published in the* Theatre Magazine, *New York, August, 1924.*

Receives the Palm

Professor Koch Awarded Litt.D. at North Dakota

By Archibald Henderson

NO HAPPIER DAY can arrive in the life of the constructive worker than that day which is recognized both as the apex and the culmination of a career. A summit is reached which marks lofty attainment after devoted and arduous struggle. With cryptic beauty Emerson has voiced this mystic truth: "The soul contains the event that shall befall it, for the event is only the actualization of its thoughts; and what we pray to ourselves for is always granted."

After thirty years of enthusiastic effort, creatively inspiring teaching, and the realization of dreams for the evocation of American folk drama, Koch has received the award of a sort of American Order of Merit. The extraordinary series of tributes paid him at the latest commencement exercises of the University of North Dakota, in which the writer felt the deepest pride and interest, constituted in essence a Koch Festival staged on the scene of his early triumphs. There, just thirty years ago, he began his real career at a salary of eight hundred dollars a year, as instructor in English, teaching freshman English, Shakespeare, and the history of the drama. There in true pioneering fashion he blazed a strange new trail, "bootlegging" the novel subject of playmaking into the staid, academic circles of North Dakota. In due time (1917), he became Professor of Dramatic Literature, anticipated in this entitlement by only one American, the late Brander Matthews of Columbia University. Today Koch has the satisfaction of seeing the once bootlegged subject of playmaking established firmly as a subject of major importance and wide popularity in the legitimate field of university education—a revolution which has become an evolution.

And so, at Grand Forks, Koch was the hero, the central figure of the commencement of the pioneer university of the prairies. A production of *Twelfth Night* in his honor, in commemoration of Koch's own production of this same play there just twenty-five years ago—the first of Shakespeare's plays ever to be produced non-professionally in North Dakota. Honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa, and the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature (both hand-lettered on parchment scrolls), the gift of a hood carrying the charming university colors of the prairie rose. He

stirred the alumni with his moving address; received as the gift of the Board of Trustees a framed photograph of the handsome new State Capitol building at Bismarck; and was honored with the installation of his own portrait in the university Hall of Fame. Of permanent historic value are the three volumes of letters from friends, former students, and celebrities in the world of literature, the theatre, and dramatic art, bound in leather embossed with the university seal, presented to him in an eloquent address by one of his former pupils, ex-Governor George F. Shafer, in whose administration the new State Capitol was built. A piquant touch, and humorous reminder of "Proff's" famous pipe, "Old Indispensable," was the gift of the Ceramics Department of the University: a tobacco jar made of North Dakota clay (as Dean Bek said: "Something from the very soil of North Dakota") and decorated by hand with figures of bronco-busters done in bentonite pigment made from volcanic ash of the Bad Lands—the jar shaped by the hands of North Dakotans and burned in a furnace fired with North Dakota lignite coal. After this heart-warming demonstration lasting several days, culminating in the commencement day exercises when Koch marched with the president of the University at the head of the procession and delivered a stirring address, *American Drama in the Making*, he was given a beautiful token of affection and *bon voyage* in the form of a purse, made up of one-dollar contributions from his former students to enable him to realize the dream of a life-time: a visit to world-famed Glacier National Park, where he could traverse the mountain trails on foot and on horseback to his heart's content. A celebration indeed—tender, moving, deep: an apex, a culmination: attainment and recognition.

Anniversary Letters

Edited By ARCHIBALD HENDERSON

ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL and significant ceremonies on the occasion of Frederick H. Koch's visit to Grand Forks as commencement speaker at the University of North Dakota was the presentation to him of three volumes of anniversary letters, collected by Dr. William G. Bek, Dean of the College of Science, Literature and Arts, bound in leather and embossed with the University seal. These "tokens of felicitous regard and deep affection" were the gift of the members of The Dakota Playmakers and of those who played the roles in *A Pageant of the Northwest,* in *Shakespeare the Playmaker,* and in the *Native Prairie Plays* of North Dakota.

The occasion was the Alumni Commencement Dinner held at the Dacotah Hotel, Grand Forks, North Dakota, on the evening of June 10, 1935. The presentation was made by a former actor and trouper of The Dakota Playmakers under Frederick H. Koch, later governor of North Dakota, the Hon. George F. Shafer. In one of the letters in these volumes, ex-Governor Shafer pays his former teacher this memorable tribute of appreciation and personal gratitude:

> I could easily write at length of your great achievements at the University, in dramatics, literature, and oratory; and of your brilliant performances at Chapel Hill, all of which is a just reward for your outstanding ability and fine character, but, personally, I prefer now to think of you as a loyal, affectionate and devoted friend who gave generously of himself to help an uncouth North Dakota youth along the way of higher education. It is the teacher who can impart, not the cold contents of his mind, but the warm spirit of his soul to his pupil, that profoundly influences him for good. This power of personal inspiration was a rare gift of yours, in the sunlight of which it was my good fortune to bask during my University days, and the memory of which I cherish with ever-increasing delight.

In these three precious volumes are found letters from former student-Playmakers and members of the faculties at North Dakota and North Carolina, and from men and women distinguished in the world of the

theatre, drama, literature, and scholarship. They constitute in themselves a sort of intellectual and emotional moving picture, an eloquent epistolary "talkie," revealing the personality and influence of Koch as reflected in the minds and hearts of friends and admirers.

I have ventured upon the difficult task of selecting, from this veritable wealth of materials, upwards of three hundred letters, certain representative passages which seem peculiarly apt and expressive.

ARTHUR HOBSON QUINN, *historian of the American drama.*

I am delighted to hear that the University of North Dakota is planning to recognize your significant contribution to the cause of the American drama. It is most appropriate that this should be done at the place where you began to create that enthusiasm so infectious and so fruitful. Our friendship of many years' standing is studded with pleasant moments, among them particularly your visits here to talk at the University of Pennsylvania and my own trip to North Carolina, where I journeyed with you across two states on the Playmakers' bus and finally had the pleasure of seeing you in your own bailiwick. You have done something which no one except yourself and your pupils has been able to do, and I believe your success is due largely to your unquenchable spirit that has never been discouraged by circumstances and that never truckled to anything that was base or banal in the theatre. The best way to epitomize your service is to try to imagine what the American drama would have been during the last twenty years without you!

ANN PRESTON BRIDGERS, *North Carolina playwright, author of* Coquette.

From that memorable date when we labored together for the Sir Walter Raleigh pageant I've blessed the fortune that brought you to Chapel Hill. I realized then when I saw the contagious and dauntless enthusiasm with which you won the cooperation of all concerned that little North Carolina playwrights and actors would hustle henceforth. And they have—myself included.

ARCHIBALD HENDERSON, *biographer of Shaw, critic, historian, and teacher.*

I regard you as a true pioneer of our day, investigating the hidden and neglected aspects of the history, intellectual, emotional, and traditional, of the American folk; and inspiring your students to attempt to clothe this rich history in the enduring investiture of art. I have looked forward to the coming occasion at Grand Forks as an event in the history

of the American theatre and in American literature. If I have in any way aided in bringing this celebration to consummation, it is because I feel that the moment is ripe for a truly national recognition of your work. This celebration will give the cachet of confirmation to the many fine things the critics have been saying of you and your work these many years. Go forward and prosper, with undiminished enthusiasm and youthful fervor. In making art come into being and survive, you give enduring life to your own name and fame.

HIRAM MOTHERWELL, *dramatic critic and editor of* Stage.

So my old friend, Fred Koch, is coming home to visit? For years he has been doing more real theatre in one year than most Broadway producers achieve in ten.

CARL CARMER, *author of* Stars Fell on Alabama.

I remember that it was my knowledge of and admiration for your work in North Dakota and North Carolina which first interested me in the folk-ways of Alabama. In the seed which you planted then, long before I came to know you personally, lay the beginnings of whatever success I may have had in the field of American letters. And I know that, just as your influence was felt in the deep South, it was felt throughout the nation.

BARRETT H. CLARK, *dramatic critic and author.*

Our American theatre would lack one valuable element of imagination and background if it had not been for the pioneer work of Frederick H. Koch.

JOHN M. MANLY, *University of Chicago. Leading authority in the field of Medieval Drama.*

From the moment I met you I understood how you had developed such an interest and such talent in the writing and production of plays by your students in North Dakota, and though not the seventh son of a seventh son, I foresaw your great success at the University of North Carolina, to which you were just going. Despite my ignorance and lack of interest in anything later than 1400, I thought we ought to have you at Chicago, but we were too poor; and you went on your triumphant way. What you have done is written in the history of American literature, and I have rejoiced in all your successes.

KENNETH MACGOWAN, *dramatic author and pioneer producer in New York and Hollywood.*

I wonder if your return to North Dakota gives you any real idea of how important your contributions have been to the teaching of native drama and the development of what must finally become our National Theatre. I don't think any letter from me can make this vivid to you, but I am sure you know that hosts of your friends, colleagues and students recognize what fine work you have done.

PAUL GREEN, *Carolina Playmaker and winner of the Pulitzer Prize in playwriting, 1927.*

After all these years of campaigning in the dramatic wars, I say hail to the leader! Ever admiringly and affectionately.

BROCK PEMBERTON, *producer and author.*

Greetings and my warmest esteem to you who have done such a great service to the spoken drama in America by keeping alive its flame in an outpost distant from any of its surviving professional centers. You have done the theatre a great service and we who love it bless you for your effort.

PERCY MACKAYE, *playwright, author, and pioneer in the Civic Theatre.*

Remembering the times when you attended my "Masque of Saint-Louis," in 1914, and soon afterwards visited me in my home, at Cornish, N. H., to confer about your early labors in creating the outdoor theatre at Grand Forks—recalling your youthful zeal then for the development of creative drama throughout our people, and your ever-increasingly-youthful ardor in the same high cause, during the auspicious growth of your Playmakers Theatre at Chapel Hill—I send you now my affectionate hail and felicitations upon your happy reunion with old friends and colleagues at the University of North Dakota, and wish you perennial welfare in your noble life-work.

FRANK L. MCVEY, *formerly President of the University of North Dakota, now President of the University of Kentucky.*

You will remember that we were associated together for a number of years at the University of North Dakota, where we struggled with the problem of a little theatre, and later on an outdoor one. You successfully developed plays, players, equipment and manuscripts with such little

money as I could help you with. It was pioneer work in many ways, and it attracted a good deal of attention throughout the land. It was a work that the people of North Dakota much appreciated and were glad to see prosper. Then you and I went away—you to North Carolina, and I to other fields. I am sure your interests, as well as mine, followed the things that were being done in the old University. You have been very successful at North Carolina, and have become a national figure. Your friends and students have followed your course with great interest and affection, and we want you to know how much we love and appreciate you. So I am wishing for you and yours a very delightful occasion and many years of interesting and effective work.

FRANK W. CHANDLER, *leading authority in the field of the Modern Drama.* Let me assure you that the country at large is in your debt for the valiant service you have rendered the cause of drama in your years of teaching and direction at North Dakota and at North Carolina. The impetus that you have given has been of the greatest value. With the decline of a public for the acted drama through the country, more and more it becomes incumbent upon those who would foster this art to aid in its development at local centres; and, of course, in the university world you stand pre-eminent in service of this sort now that Professor George P. Baker has gone.

WALTER PRITCHARD EATON, *dramatic critic, playwright, and teacher.* Why should I "honor" you for starting courses in playwriting? Tell me that! If it weren't for G. P. Baker and you, I'd be starving happily in the Berkshires right now, instead of stuffing sadly in the grime of New Haven; and I'd be surrounded by chickadees, cows, rabbits, and horned owls instead of would-be playwrights. In the words of the old song, "you made me what I am tonight; I hope you're satisfied." "Honor" you—me eye. I hate you. I despise you. I think you should be ashamed of yourself. I know you're not. But, old top, just the same, here's how!

EDITH J. R. ISAACS, *founder and editor of* Theatre Arts Monthly. It was at the University of North Dakota that I first knew you and your work, and it is a pleasure to think of you out there celebrating long years of progress and achievement. Here at the office of *Theatre Arts Monthly* we have half a dozen touchstones of the growth of an American national

theatre. One of these—one of the chief among them—is the growth of your work in folk-playmaking. We have watched it develop from year to year, watched the young people that you have taught go out as teachers and as playwrights, enriching the theatre and educational life of the country. Yet we see you today almost the youngest among them all, with your hopes still high and new work steadily in hand.

FRANK PORTER GRAHAM, *President of the University of North Carolina.*

North Dakota and North Carolina have a common pride and a common tradition in you and your work. The North Dakota folk plays and the North Carolina folk plays are famous throughout America. Grand Forks and Chapel Hill, as your immortal spiritual homes, will ever be the creative centers of the folk movement in America. Out of Dakota and Carolina have come a folk drama movement that will give life to drama coming out of the lives of our people on the farms, in the mountain coves, along the tidewater sounds, on the western plains, in the great cities—wherever our people live, work, suffer, and dream.

GEORGE C. D. ODELL, *historian of the New York stage.*

Please accept my congratulations on this occasion of your jubilee. The inspiring work you have accomplished well deserves the recognition your friends have accorded it. Felicitations and best wishes for a long continuance of health and helpful activity!

HARRY WOODBURN CHASE, *President of New York University, formerly President of the University of North Carolina.*

The work which you have been doing at the University of North Carolina all these years has been tremendously significant, in my judgment. One of the amazing things to me about it always has been to see how much talent for dramatic writing and acting lay dormant just under the surface in so many people. You have made a real contribution to dramatic art in America and I have always been very proud of the fact that you were good enough to dedicate to me one of the volumes of the plays that your students published. Just a little while ago in the Morgan Library I picked up the original manuscript of Dickens' Christmas Carol and my mind went back immediately to those Christmas readings that you used to give every year so effectively that all the children in the neighborhood were afraid of Marley's ghost for the next week.

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY, *playwright, author, director, and teacher.*

Your distinction as a scholar, an artist, a citizen with a deep appreciation of what that much misused term really means, added to a wide knowledge of human life and affairs, have combined to make you one of the foremost ornaments of our national creative endeavor. Your work at the University of North Carolina is a monument of spiritual and artistic achievement, whose influence is already one of the big things in these United States.

ROBERT EDMOND JONES, *leading scenic designer and authority in theatre arts.*

Allow me to congratulate you on this occasion and to express my personal appreciation of the inspiring work you have done and are doing for the theatre.

HUBERT HEFFNER, *formerly Assistant Director of The Carolina Playmakers, now Head of the Graduate Division of the Drama Department, Northwestern University. He and Paul Green were members of Professor Koch's playwriting course in 1919-1920.*

The University in which you began your great work and to which you made a splendid contribution has seen fit to honor you for that work. In honoring you she honors herself and confers a recognition upon that great cultural institution, the theatre. Though that work began on the prairies of Dakota, it has spread throughout the length and breadth of this land. You have through your energy, persistence, and fine enthusiasm written yourself and your idea into not only the history of the American theatre, but into the history of American education and culture as well. Today the work which you so largely began is flourishing in almost every American college and high school in this land. Not a season passes on Broadway that does not attest in some measure the power of your influence in making America conscious of her own dramatic worth. In bringing to us this consciousness of our national wealth in dramatic sources you have aided in perpetuating our declaration of independence at the same time that you have made us appreciate our ancient and enduring heritage from the past—our heritage in the universality of great drama, which you have rightly said must first be intensely and truly local to be universal. North Dakota in fittingly recognizing what you have accomplished in this, is speaking therefore, for the nation of today and of tomorrow as well as for herself. In the love of the theatre and the

drama, in the high esteem in which you have taught us to regard them, you have passed on to us a heritage that has enriched and enobled our lives. You have given us something that gold cannot buy, that time cannot efface. In this you have been the great teacher. You have acquired in our lives and in the lives to whom we pass on your ideas and ideals an immortality that will outlast the printed page or the sculptured bronze.

A Song of the Prairies

By F. H. K.

Prairies, I sing of the prairies,
Of the teeming Dakota plain—
Treeless, potential, triumphant,
Bursting with sun-ripened grain.

I sing of the unflecked sunshine,
Of wild roses—a wilderness gay—
Of meadows welling over with lark song
And the vast turquoise dome of the day.

I sing of a pioneer people
Of men strong-hewn, vision-clear,
Of lithe-limbed, deep-bosomed women
And the tall, sturdy children they bear.

Prairies, I sing of the prairies,
A toast now—and every man stand—
A toast to the prairies triumphant,
To the dauntless Dakota land!

**First impressions of the Dakota prairie written by Professor Koch in his early days at the University of North Dakota, and read by him in a reminiscent talk at the dinner given him on the occasion of the reunion of a large company of his former students at the Dacotah Hotel in Grand Forks on Monday evening, June 10, 1935.*

American Drama in the Making

A Commencement Address Delivered at the University of North Dakota on June 11, 1935

By FREDERICK KOCH

THE THEATRE has always been intimately cherished in the life of man and the dramatic is perhaps the earliest of all the arts. The impulse is deep-rooted. When we go to the theatre today or read the plays of Shakespeare or Shaw we are prone to forget the crude but none the less vigorous beginnings of the highly organized modern theatre of Broadway and Hollywood—the ceremonial dance and rhythmic chant to the monotonous drum-beat or skirling pipe common to primitive races the world over, the grotesque masks and painted bodies of the savage celebrants which anticipated the glamorous scenic investiture of our modern stage. Primitive dramatic expression was usually religious. The elaborate snake dance of our Hopi Indians on the mesas of New Mexico and the three-day sun dance of the Shoshones in their Wind River country of western Wyoming are colorful illustrations of the ancient culture of our aboriginal Americans. The civilized theatre is but the natural evolution of the song-and-dance drama of such primitive worshipers.

The drama of the great Greeks is the fulfillment in poetry of the religion and the patriotism of Hellenic worshipers at the altar of Dionysus. Their theatre was at once church and state, and the drama of Shakespeare is the complete outflowering of the simple liturgical plays at the high altar of the Medieval church at Easter and at Christmas time.

The theatre has always been cherished by the people. And no wonder! It is a part of man's nature to project in vivid images his deepest desires and remembrances. The drama is the most objective of all the literary arts—the most active and vital. Its medium, the actor, is the human being himself and the theatre presents the life of man on the stage, in action.

Folk Drama

The action represented is in the form of a conflict. It may be the struggle of man against the forces of nature, or it may be restricted to the complex social order of a highly sophisticated society. The drama of the conflict of man with the forces of nature may be termed "folk drama." The conflict may not be apparent on the surface in the immediate action on the stage but the ultimate cause of all dramatic action that we classify as "folk," whether the struggle be physical or spiritual, may be found in man's desperate fight for existence.

The term "folk drama" is here used in a new sense, not limited to the communal folk plays of Medieval times (often attributed by scholars to group authorship) which took the form of Christmas pantomines by village mummers, jigs, sword dances, festivals and various other community celebrations. The term folk drama as

here used designates the work of a single artist dealing consciously with his materials —the folkways of our less sophisticated and more elemental people, living simple lives apart from the responsibilities of a highly organized social order. It has nothing whatever to do with communal authorship but is concerned only with folk subject matter. It goes back directly to the dramatic beginnings.

The term here applies to that form of drama which is earth-rooted in the lives of a struggling humanity. It may be Prometheus of Aeschylus' play bringing to man the gift of fire. It may be the apotheosis of the popular imagination symbolized by the crown of an ideal leader whom the people call their king, as in Shakespeare's *King Henry V.* It is the democratic King Henry who before the momentous battle of Agincourt mingles with the common soldiers, ill-fed and cold, himself disguised, and assures them: "He today that sheds his blood with me Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, This day shall *gentle* his condition."

And before the walls of Harfleur it is this same popular leader who spurs his soldiers on to victory with the exhaultant challenge:

"—And you, good yeomen,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture; let us swear
That you are worth your breeding; which I doubt not;
For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit, and upon this charge
Cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' "

It may be the tenant share-cropper of the cotton fields of eastern Carolina in our earliest "Carolina Folk-Play" dealing with this benighted class, Harold Williamson's tragedy of *Peggy;* it may be the Negro leader fighting for a place for his people in Paul Green's epic tragedy of the Negro, *In Abraham's Bosom;* or the pallid mill-worker in Loretto and J. O. Bailey's play of industrial revolution in North Carolina, *Strike Song;* or the gorilla-like stoker in the hold of a sea-going palace in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape;* or the most degenerate poor white "cracker" of the backlands of Georgia in the recent Broadway success, *Tobacco Road.*

Sophisticated Drama

Such recent folk-plays contrast vividly with the Shakespearean high comedies; with the sophisticated restoration plays of the dissolute court of Charles II illustrated in Congreve's *Love for Love;* with the brittle satire of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *School for Scandal* in the eighteenth century; with Oscar Wilde's scintillating epigrams in *The Importance of Being Earnest* in the nineteenth; and with the mad people of Noel Coward in contemporary English society. On the continent they contrast with such amusing pieces as Arthur Schnitzler's *The Affairs of Anatole* and Ferenc Molnar's *Fashions for Men.* And in America contrast is found in the type of drama written by such playwrights as Philip Barry in whimsical studies like *Paris Bound* and *Holiday.*

The stately old drama of the Greeks and the Elizabethans is usually thought of as sophisticated drama because it deals chiefly with kings and princes of an aristocratic society. It must be remembered in this connection, however, that the great plays of Aeschylus and his contemporaries had their origins in the folk rituals of Dionysus, in the folk tales of the popular imagination, just as the great poetic drama of *Faust* was wrought by Goethe from the

popular story of the Medieval magician, Doctor Faustus, and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* was drawn from the vast store of Scandinavian folklore.

The plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries are commonly thought of as sophisticated drama because they deal mainly with the glamorous court life of Elizabethan England. But it must be borne in mind that the court of Queen Elizabeth was the embodiment of the splendid dream of the common people and that "Good Queen Bess" (not "Queen Elizabeth") was their ideal—that Shakespeare came from the great middle class of the English folk and expressed in his plays their dream of democratic rule.

The New Drama

With the rise of democracy and the increasing power of the peasant and industrial classes, dramatists have come in recent years to express the changing folkways of the plain man. In England appeared John Galsworthy with *Strife* and *Justice;* in Germany, Gerhart Hauptmann with *The Weavers* and *The Sunken Bell;* in Russia, Maxim Gorky with *The Lower Depths*, Leo Tolstoy with *The Living Corpse*, Anton Tchekhov with the revolutionary *Cherry Orchard;* and in Norway and Sweden, Björnson and Strindberg with *The Bankrupt* and *The Father.* The Father of Modern Drama, Henrik Ibsen, was first of all a dramatist of the folk in such notable plays as *Peer Gynt*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People.*

One of the most significant instances of the new dramatic movement is the Irish folk drama of The Abbey Theatre of Dublin which played so prominent a part in the revolution and in the formation of the Irish Free State. Undoubtedly the new Irish drama has pointed the way for us in this country toward the making of our own new American folk drama.

American Folk Drama

For many years our playwrights were imitative, content with reproducing the outlived formulas of the old world. There was nothing really native about them. Whenever they did write of American life the treatment was superficial and innocuous.

When Augustus Thomas wrote *Alabama*, *Arizona* and *In Mizzoura* optimistic heralds announced the arrival of the "Great American Drama," but the playwright barely skimmed the surfaces of these colorful states. His next play, *The Witching Hour*, had something of the jessamine perfume of Kentucky romance, but the ghost of the old well-made melodrama was lugged in to resolve the plot. Then there was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a grand old theatre piece, but its treatment of the southern Negro was sentimental. It remained for William Vaughn Moody to give us the first important American folk drama, *The Great Divide*, the conflict of the Arizona frontier with the puritan conscience of New England; and for Paul Green of North Carolina to give us the first authentic folk drama of our native Negro in his epic tragedy, *In Abraham's Bosom*, which was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1927.

Dakota Folk-Plays

As far as we know, the first use of the term "folk-play" in American dramatic annals was the announcement on the initial bill of "Original Folk-Plays" of the then newly organized Carolina Playmakers at the University of North Carolina seventeen years ago. But our Carolina plays were anticipated by the "Native Prairie Plays" of The Dakota Playmakers. The first of these was written by eighteen undergraduate students in collaboration on the occasion of the dedication of The Bankside Theatre of the University of North Dakota in 1914. It was an epic

drama of the making of the great North-West.[1]. . .

In succeeding years came a wide range of simple folk-plays portraying scenes of ranch and farm life, adventures of the frontier settlers, and incidents of the cowboy trails. . . .

They were simple folk-plays of the Dakota prairie, sometimes crude but always near to the good, strong, wind-swept soil, telling of the long bitter winters in the little sod shanty, singing too of the springtime of unflected sunshine, of the wilderness gay with wild roses, of the fenceless fields welling over with lark song, of the travail and the achievement of a pioneer people.

From the first our particular interest was in the locality—in the native materials—and in the making of fresh dramatic forms in playwriting and in acting. For we felt that if the young writer observed the locality and interpreted it faithfully, it would show him the way to the universal. For, if we can see the "interesting-ness" of the lives of those about us with imagination, with wonder, why may we not interpret that life in significant images for others—perhaps for all? It was so with the Greeks and with our own English forbears. It has been so in all lasting art.

The plays of The Carolina Playmakers are really a continuation of the work of the pioneer Playmakers of Dakota. The "Carolina Folk-Plays," like those of Dakota, are plays of common experience and common interest, ranging in scene from the Great Smoky Mountains on the western border to the shifting shoals of Cape Hatteras. . . .

Carolina Folk-Plays

Four volumes of these *Carolina Folk-Plays* written by twenty-one student authors have been published and produced all over the United States and even as far away as London and Honolulu. The Playmakers have made thirty-two tours, traveling in their own Show-Bus with three sets of scenery atop, not only in their home state of North Carolina, but all the way from southern Georgia to New England, playing in the leading cities—Baltimore, Washington, D. C., New York City, and Boston—and as far west as St. Louis, Missouri, where they played at The First National Folk Festival in 1934. They have played to total audiences numbering more than 275,000. Before the organization of The Carolina Playmakers there was no stage on the University campus where plays could be presented. At that time, according to Barrett Clark, the entire state was stricken from the mailing list of Samuel French, publisher of plays, as a *dead* state in its dramatic interest—so dead, in fact, as not to warrant the postage necessary for the mailing of play catalogues. Today there are a dozen courses in playwriting and theatre arts in the curriculum of the University, a student may do his major work in the drama, and a candidate for the M.A. degree may write a play in lieu of the traditional thesis. And there is acting everywhere in the Carolina country—in high schools and colleges and little theatres from the Smoky Mountains to the sea.

Now we have our own theatre building of classic design, the first such building in America to be dedicated to a native drama of its own making, and a lovely outdoor theatre, The Forest Theatre, which furnishes an ideal setting for Shakespearean productions. Since the simple beginnings of these student Playmakers at Chapel Hill seventeen years ago two of their own number have found professional production on Broadway: Paul Green, author of *In Abra-*

[1] *A Pageant of the Northwest* published by the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, in 1914.

ham's Bosom, The Field God, The House of Connelly, Roll, Sweet Chariot; and Loretto Carroll Bailey whose stirring drama of North Carolina mill-folk, *Strike Song,* produced originally on our Playmakers' stage in 1931, is announced as the opening production of *The Theatre Union* at the Civic Repertory Theatre in New York in September. Besides these, three other native North Carolinians have followed the home-trail blazed by our student playwrights at the University and have made important contributions to American folk drama on Broadway: Lulu Vollmer, in *Sun-Up;* Hatcher Hughes, in *Hell Bent for Heaven;* and Ann Bridgers, in *Coquette.*

The influence of our native folk drama of Dakota and Carolina has been tersely summarized by the authoritative critic and historian of the drama, Montrose J. Moses, in a recent issue of *Current History.*[2] He avers that we have "every reason to exult that our private idea of folk drama as first practiced in North Dakota and further sustained in North Carolina has been so thoroughly assimilated throughout the land."

New York has recently witnessed a veritable renaissance of American folk drama in such plays as Marc Connelly's Negro religious drama, *The Green Pastures;* such stirring plays of social protest as *They Shall Not Die* of the Scottsboro Case; The Theatre Union's production of the anti-war dramas, *Peace on Earth* and *Sailors of Catarro; Stevedore* dealing with the exploitation of the Negro in New Orleans; and *The Pit* dealing with the benighted mine workers of West Virginia; Clifford Odet's *Awake and Sing,* and *Waiting for Lefty* about the striking taxi drivers in New York City; *The Petrified Forest* of Arizona; *The Farmer Takes a Wife* of the early days of the Erie Canal; *Mother Lode* and *Gold Eagle Guy* of the frontier days in California; *Tight Britches* of the Great Smoky Mountain people of North Carolina; and Paul Green's new symphonic drama of a Negro neighborhood, *Roll, Sweet Chariot.*

MAXWELL ANDERSON

Most significant today, it seems to me, is our own Maxwell Anderson's historic folk drama of George Washington, *Valley Forge,* perhaps the most important play of the past season. Max was a charter member of our first dramatic group here, and when our original Dakota Prairie Plays began to come, much elated, he wrote from far-away California: "Thank God, a real folk drama of Dakota! Like the Irish! If I thought that, I would willingly walk all the way back there to put my foot on the old sod and see the Dakota folk-plays!"

The first play that he wrote for Broadway, you will remember, was *White Desert,* a play of the vast winter plain of North Dakota—its loneliness.

You are all familiar with the scene of another of his early plays, *Outside Looking In.* It is on the banks of the Red River of the North under the great cottonwoods at East Grand Forks,[3] and the characters are the picturesque hoboes who gather there every spring. It was a thrilling experience for me when I sat with Max and his little wife, Margaret Haskett,[4] watching a rehearsal of this play in the Greenwich Village Theatre in New York. Out of the dark of the theatre suddenly leaped the words, "East Grand Forks," from the mouth of the only woman in the play. The playwright had immortalized East Grand Forks in American dramatic literature.

[2] "The American Note in Drama" by Montrose J. Moses, *Current History,* October, 1933.

[3] The University of North Dakota is situated in Grand Forks. East Grand Forks is just across the Red River of the North in Minnesota.

[4] Margaret Haskett was also a charter member of the original dramatic group at the University of North Dakota.

In *Valley Forge*[5] Maxwell Anderson has transformed the legend of George Washington into a living reality—from a postage stamp he has lifted the Father of his Country to real life on the stage. More than this, he has vivified the heroic struggle of our colonial forbears to make the American dream a reality. And he has succeeded (even more so than in his earlier poetic plays, *Elizabeth the Queen* and *Mary of Scotland)* in creating a natural blank verse —verse that aspires to the high plane of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Witness the following lines from the last scene of *Valley Forge:*

WASHINGTON: *(Looking at the dead privates)*
Mason and Nick and Neil—and Tench.
They died here
and earned their ground.
This liberty will look easy by and by
when nobody dies to get it.

Of *Valley Forge,* Brooks Atkinson, dramatic critic of *The New York Times,* says: "It is streaked with greatness. It has restored the English language to its high estate as an instrument of lustrous beauty. It is an out-spoken drama in which men and women face each other boldly; their blood is hot and their courage defiant. . . . Drama of extraordinary stature." Of poetic imagination!

As an epilogue, I want to read a message from our distinguished Dakota Playmaker, Maxwell Anderson, himself, which he sent for me to read on this occasion. Modestly he wrote of his own fine achievement when I congratulated him on the success of *Valley Forge:* . . . "I would feel much better about the matter if I thought the American drama deserved to be ranked among the great theatres of the world. So far our theatre has only made a beginning and it will take a vast amount of luck and genius to take us anywhere near what the Greeks and the Elizabethans accomplished. Nevertheless the next generation has the big chance and I hope the boys and girls of North Dakota know that. I am enclosing a little reminiscent poem[6] about North Dakota campus which might sound well if you read it."

[LATER NOTE: Maxwell Anderson has taken a further step in his experimentation with poetic dialogue in his latest play, *Winterset,* produced in New York on September 25, 1935. Whereas *Valley Forge* was written around an heroic figure of history, *Winterset* deals with common folk in a realistic contemporary American setting. The following selection will suggest the style of Anderson's latest work:

"This is the glory of earth-born men and
women,
not to cringe, never to yield, but standing,
take defeat implacable and defiant,
die unsubmitting. . . .
On this star,
in this hard star-adventure, knowing not
what the fires mean to right and left nor
whether
a meaning was intended or presumed,
man can stand up, and look out blind, and
say:
in all these turning lights I find no clue,
only a masterless night, and in my blood
no certain answer, yet is my mind my
own,
yet is my heart a cry toward something
dim
in distance, which is higher than I am
and makes me emperor of the endless
dark
even in seeking!]

[5] Produced by The New York Theatre Guild in their Guild Theatre on December 10, 1934.

[6] The poem appears on the opposite page.

1908-1935

(*For F. H. Koch*)

By MAXWELL ANDERSON

Why, then, it's twenty-seven years
Since first I took a class with you!
Rein in your steeds, you charioteers,
The days run fast, and all too few!

Rein in, and sit about with us
And drink a beer—we'll pay the score—
To days far-off, miraculous,
Some quarter century or more.

Things I remember? Here they are,
Like beads oft-told, worn down to grain:
Professor Squires, an avatar,
Discussing Shenstone in the rain.

Professor Hult, in class-room prayer,
Invoking his "Beloved Pan",
And all high gods of earth and air
Eternal over mortal man.

Professor Koch, from Emerson,
Reading with emphasis aright
The Faustian decasyllabon,
Or Tamburlaine's long last good night.

"To entertain Zenocrate,
Divine Zenocrate," he said.
Then I remember one I loved
Who walked these paths, and now is dead.

And now is dead. If not again
I should revisit you, who see
Only Dakota's greening plain,
Only the spring-time flower and tree,

Think not I have forgotten. No.
But every turn of shrubbery
Would mind me how the loveliest go
To join divine Zenocrate.

Let me remember coulee bank
As in a spring long drowned and gone,
The railroad spur, the water-tank,
The dirt roads leading out and on—

Roads we all travel, on and down
Toward what the years may bind or bring,
Away from Davis and from Main,
Away, alas, from Spring.

NOTE: *A reminiscent poem written by Maxwell Anderson, a charter member of the first dramatic group Professor Koch organized at the University of North Dakota, and now distinguished American playwright. It was written especially for the Commencement exercises at the University of North Dakota on June 11, 1935.*

Koch

By Archibald Henderson

ONE OF THE SALIENT FIGURES in the history of the contemporary American theatre and American drama is F. H. Koch. Perhaps our leading critic of the drama, Walter Prichard Eaton, some years ago expressed the opinion that Professor Koch "is far more important to the future of the American stage than Belasco or Arthur Hopkins."

Koch's remarkable work, accomplished with fervent enthusiasm and tireless energy in the field of communal drama and student playwriting has recently been recognized by the conferring upon him of one of the distinguished professorships, never awarded save for work of exceptional value and character, the Kenan Professorship of Dramatic Literature at the University of North Carolina, one of the country's great centers of creative scholarship; and the magnificent demonstration in his honor at the 1935 commencement exercises of the University of North Dakota. His work in the stimulating of folk-playwriting and in leadership of the communal drama movement has won the unqualified appreciation of our best critics. In his important survey of the Little Theatre movement in the United States towards a National Theatre, *Footlights Across America* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York—1929), Kenneth Macgowan, after describing Professor Koch's materials, method and pedagogical technic, says: "This is the way of folk-playwriting, the way of the local drama. I do not know of a sounder. The dramatic instinct is close to being inborn. A man may train himself to craftsmanship if he can go to the theatre enough. But a point of view like Koch's is a creative short cut. It is an invaluable contribution."

Life and Career

Frederick H. Koch was born at Covington, Ky., September 12, 1877. He was graduated at Ohio Wesleyan University in 1900. He enjoyed the advantages of the study of art and architecture in Europe, North Africa and Syria. In 1905 he began his professional career, as instructor in English at the University of North Dakota; and held in turn there the post of assistant professor (1907), associate professor (1914) and professor of dramatic literature (1917). Here he founded the Sock and Buskin Society in 1905 of which Maxwell Anderson was an original member, and the Dakota Playmakers in 1910. In the *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (James T. White and Company, New York—1930) appears the following succinct account of his activities at the University of North Dakota:

The Dakota Playmakers

"The membership of this organization (The Dakota Playmakers) consisted of amateurs devoted to the establishment of a native theatre, and the production of native plays through co-operative authorship and acting. Local history and tradition furnished the subject matter of these folk-plays, and native amateurs presented them. A marked stimulus to rural interest in the drama resulted in the development of two types of production: the pageant, the spectacular features of which enlisted the communal activity of many persons; and the folk-play, a simple form with a plot, faithfully depicting scenes and situations drawn from the life of the people. The renaissance of pageantry having already extended throughout America from England, where it began in 1905, the original contribution of Professor Koch and

his colleagues was the folk-play, with its communal authorship and presentation, under the leadership of a director who controlled and harmonized the contributions of the various participants. This community of interest in drama writing enabled a broader field of subjects and more versatile talents to be introduced than were possible by sole authorship. There in North Dakota the folk-plays portrayed scenes from ranch life, the adversities of pioneer settlers, and incidents along the cowboy trails. The folk-players toured the state, enacting upon a simple portable stage their 'Prairie Plays,' which the people received with enthusiasm and approval. Trained leaders in folk-play-making from the University of North Dakota established successful centers of communal playmaking at the State Agricultural College at Fargo and other places, from which, in turn, went teachers of rural communal playmaking."

The Bankside Theatre

Another original contribution of Professor Koch and his colleagues in North Dakota was The Bankside Theatre, completed at Grand Forks in 1914, a new type of outdoor theatre adapted to a natural setting. The communal drama required suitable open-air surroundings for presentation, and as the prairie land lacked a hillslope for an amphitheatre, a site was chosen through which ran a stream with a curve which served to separate the stage from the audience. The setting was picturesque. The Bankside Theatre was the first theatre in the world, so far as known, to utilize the natural curve of a stream to separate the stage from the audience. This added another dimension to the stage, in that the stream permitted entrances and exits by water. Always, too, there was a picturesque effect in the reflection of the stage scene, by day or night. The stream also served as a sound reflector, making the acoustics of this open-air auditorium well nigh perfect.

Making a Native Drama

The stimulating activities and definite accomplishments of Professor Koch in establishing American folk-plays in rural sections made him of note in the literary and theatrical world as the pioneer of a new dramatic school. Professor Arthur Hobson Quinn of the University of Pennsylvania, author of the monumental *History of the American Drama* in two volumes (Harper and Bros.—1927), says: "Such an impulse as that started by Professor Koch is of great significance." In chapter XXIII of the second volume of that work, which is devoted almost exclusively to the work of Professor Koch and its consequences, Dr. Quinn says: "The credit for an interesting development, which was amateur in its inception, but which culminated in the production of plays on the professional stage in New York, is to be given to Professor Frederick H. Koch." And in a letter to Koch, December 15, 1933, he forthrightly says: "Through your engaging enthusiasm and your skill in making people work with you, you have stimulated one of the most significant creative movements in the art of this country."

As the direct result of the wide-spread reputation he had won, for unique contributions to the American theatre and drama, Koch was called, through the influence of Dr. Edwin Greenlaw, then head of the department of English at the University of North Carolina, to that institution in 1918, as professor of dramatic literature, which position he still holds.

The Carolina Playmakers

At the University of North Carolina, Koch has greatly extended the field of his activities and successfully handled a group of new problems. North Carolina stretches

from high mountains on the west to the ocean on the east; is rich in historical incidents and traditions, dating from the coming of the earliest English settlers; and has a great variety of interesting types of individual social and industrial life, tenant farmers in the east, textile workers in the Piedmont region, and mountaineers in the west. Koch introduced into North Carolina the idea of cooperative authorship of the rural community drama. Since 1918 he has been head of The Carolina Playmakers, organized by him in that year for the local production of folk-plays, and incorporated in 1921. One of his first steps, after arrival in Chapel Hill, was to organize the Bureau of Community Drama as a unit of the Extension Division of the University. He soon established a circulating Dramatic Library, available to community drama groups throughout North Carolina—a library now numbering more than 2,000 volumes. Of like service to his students is the collection of American plays, covering a century and a half and now numbering upwards of 3,500 volumes, presented to the University by Archibald Henderson. In 1923 he was the prime mover in organizing the state-wide Carolina Dramatic Association, holding in each year a Dramatic Festival and State Tournament for the purpose of cultivating dramatic endeavor in communities throughout the state and laying securely the foundations for a real people's theatre in North Carolina. The Carolina Dramatic Association, which has been the wonder and the admiration of leaders in other parts of the country, now embraces 65 dramatic groups, representing city and county high schools, Little Theatre and community organizations, college and junior college groups, and extending from the mountains to the sea. During the past academic year, the Carolina Playmakers enjoyed the added advantage of the services of one of their most talented graduates, John W. Parker, as Extension Instructor in the Dramatic Arts and State Representative of the Bureau of Community Drama. Mr. Parker is available as a dramatic organizer and director to schools and towns throughout the state.

Extensive Touring

In 1920, The Carolina Playmakers made their first tour of the state; and since that time have made 30 tours. Traveling in their Playmakers Show-Bus with three sets of their own scenery atop, including portable lighting equipment, costumes, and stage properties, they have played all over North Carolina—in cross-roads villages, in the mountains, in towns of the Piedmont section, and in "neighborhoods" by the sea—in school auditoriums, old-time "Opera Houses," and outlived Town Halls. In addition to these highly successful state tours, which caught the popular imagination with plays deep-rooted in the basic elements of regional life, The Carolina Playmakers have toured in a dozen other states. In Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts, they have played to audiences totaling more than 200,000 people. They have played in the beautiful University Theatre at Yale, and thrice at Columbia University. They played with notable success at St. Louis in the National Folk Festival in 1934. When they gave two performances at the Fine Arts Theatre in Boston, the company was personally welcomed by Governor Frank Allen at the State House; and on their first visit to Washington they were cordially received by President Calvin Coolidge at the White House. The work of the Carolina Playmakers, under the leadership of Professor Koch, has often been favorably compared to that of the Abbey Players, associated with the names

of Lady Gregory, William Butler Yeats, John M. Synge, and Lennox Robinson.

The enthusiasm with which they have been greeted everywhere is the most irrefutable evidence of their power and influence. On the publication of the first series of *Carolina Folk-Plays,* Augustus Thomas wrote (The New York *Review*): "I consider them fully equal to any of the Irish folklore plays produced by the Abbey Company under Lady Gregory's direction"; and Maxwell Anderson described them (The New York *World)* as "Likely to be of more moment in the history of the drama in the United States than the work of all the manufacturers and importers of theatrical novelties who are famous as producers in this city."

Inspiring Teacher

In his *About Ourselves: Psychology for Normal People* (Norton, New York, 1927), Dr. Harry A. Overstreet describes Professor Koch as a "great teacher, who believes in the dreams that lie hidden beneath the mind of the commonplace in his students." His methodless method is truly educative and stimulative: to inspire rather than to dissect, to stir rather than to analyze. So successful has been his work in arousing dormant talent that, during the past year, the experimental productions of original plays by his students, over and above the finished public productions, has reached the remarkable figure of fifty-four. In all of his work, Koch has emphasized the element of cooperation; and the conspicious success of his undertakings has been due in no small measure to the enthusiastic assistance of the University's departments of literature, history, music, art and engineering.

Professor Koch, who received his Master's degree from Harvard University in 1909, has lectured frequently throughout the country, being in constant demand to describe the famous work in student playwriting and production going on at the University of North Carolina. He has been heard, among innumerable places that might be mentioned, in the Town Hall, New York City; Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences; Institute of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University; the Philadelphia Public Forum; the Chautauqua Institution, Lake Chautauqua, New York; and at many universities, including Chicago, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Texas, and New Mexico. He has served as Exchange Professor at the University of Manitoba (1918); and as visiting professor has given courses in summer sessions at the University of California (1910, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930), Columbia University (1925, 1926, 1935), University of Southern California (1930, 1931), New York University (1932), University of Colorado (1922, 1933), University of Toledo (1934), and Northwestern University (1934).

Creative Writer and Critic

In the field of authorship, Koch has given many concrete proofs of his love for the theatre and his gift of poetic and dramatic composition. At North Dakota he published a number of books and monographs, including *Making a Pageant of the North-West* (1914), *Amateur Values in Pageantry* (1915), *The Amateur Theatre in the University* (1916), *The University Laboratory and Festival Theatres* (1916), and *Toward the Municipal Theatre* (1916); and was directing author of two communal dramas produced at North Dakota: *A Pageant of the North-West* (1914) in collaboration with eighteen student-writers, and *Shakespeare, the Playmaker* (1916), written in collaboration with twenty students of the University, for the Shakespeare tercentenary.

Since he has been at the University of North Carolina, Koch has written, in addition to many published lectures and addresses, *Plays for Amateurs,* with Eliza-

beth A. Lay (1920), *Raleigh, the Shepherd of the Ocean* (1920), a tercentenary pageant drama produced at Raleigh, North Carolina; *A Pageant of the Lower Cape Fear* (1921), a communal drama produced at Wilmington, North Carolina, *Play Producing for Amateurs* (1922), *The Carolina Playmakers* (1922), and *Original Folk Plays of North Carolina* (1923). An important contribution, the value of which can scarcely be fully assessed as yet, is Koch's editing of four volumes of original plays written by his students, selected from hundreds: *Carolina Folk-Plays*, first, second and third series (Henry Holt and Company, New York—1922, 1924, 1928, respectively), and *Carolina Folk Comedies* (Samuel French, New York, 1931). The introductions, prefaces and bibliographies, attached to these volumes, serve as a history of the entire movement which Koch has directed and led. Professor Koch now has in preparation a new volume, *American Folk-Plays*, to be published by D. Appleton-Century Company —native plays written by his students from many American states, and descriptive of their own widely differing habitats.

A notable magazine which has just rounded out its eighth year, is *The Carolina Play-Book*, a dramatic periodical, published jointly by The Carolina Playmakers and the Carolina Dramatic Association with subscribers in seven foreign countries, including China, Korea and South Africa, which he founded in 1923. In token of recognition of its high quality, *The Carolina Play-Book* was chosen for inclusion in the International Exhibition of Periodicals at The Century of Progress Exposition at Chicago, one of only three theatrical periodicals included, the other two being *Theatre Arts* and *The Stage*.

Three Constructive Contributions

Professor Koch has succeeded in overcoming the difficulties regarding production, and now the Carolina folk-plays are produced in a beautiful theatre. At first, Koch had to design a portable stage in the auditorium of the Chapel Hill high school building for the production of plays. Later, through the aid of a grant from one of the national foundations, one of the oldest of the University buildings, beautifully proportioned and of classic design, formerly the University Library and ballroom, was converted into a most attractive theatre. This is the first theatre building in America to be dedicated to a native drama of its own making.

It may be mentioned, in evidence of his activities and far-flung interests, that Professor Koch is a member, and in some cases officer, of many national organizations for the maintenance of the theatre and drama, among which may be mentioned: Drama League of America (Director), American Pageant Association (Director), American National Theatre (Director, 1923), National Shakespeare Federation (vice-president for North Carolina), Shakespeare Association of America (vice-president), National Negro Theatre (member Advisory Council, 1923), The National Theatre Conference (member of the Council, and Southern Regional Director, since 1932, and president of the North Carolina Literary and Historical Association, (1925). Recently he was appointed Regional Director of the Federal Theatre Projects for Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina under the Works Progress Administration.

Perhaps the most significant result of Koch's work has been the emergence from The Carolina Playmakers of the noted American playwright Paul Green, author of *In Abraham's Bosom* (Pulitzer Prize, 1927), *The Field God*, *The House of Connelly*, *Roll Sweet Chariot*, *Tread the Green Grass*, and many other plays. Last season The Carolina Playmakers made the initial production of *Shroud My Body Down*, a symphonic drama of Carolina country folk, and they are now preparing

the world *première* of Mr. Green's latest work, *The Enchanted Maze*, a challenging drama of American university life. During the era of The Carolina Playmakers, three other native North Carolinians, Lula Vollmer, Hatcher Hughes, and Ann Bridgers, have made significant contributions to American folk drama in *Sun-Up*, *Hell Bent for Heaven*, and *Coquette*. Two erstwhile Carolina Playmakers, awarded Guggenheim Fellowships in the field of the novel, are Thomas Wolfe, author of *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, and Jonathan Daniels, author of *Clash of Angels*.

Of vast promise for the future extension of drama study and practice in public school education is the introduction in the state high school curriculum this year of two years of dramatic training as an alternative for the traditional course of English study in the sophomore and junior years.

Summation

Frederick H. Koch has been felicitously characterized by Montrose J. Moses as "an inspired teacher—a veritable Peter Pan in academic clothes" with an "unflinching hold upon the theatre as a temple in which there is an altar where burns the undying flame which is the heart and soul of all great drama." In *Current History*, October, 1933, he has thus evaluated Koch's contribution:

"Professor Koch has for 25 years or more been faithful to that first idea of his, and he has so thoroughly taught and demonstrated it all over the country that to him we owe not a little of the authentic honesty that has come into American drama . . . Professor Koch has every reason to exult that his private idea of folk drama as first practised in North Dakota and further sustained in North Carolina has been so thoroughly assimilated throughout the land."

In *Footlights Across America*, Kenneth Macgowan says: "North Carolina has done more than any other state to justify a plea for local drama. . . . I am thinking of the life effort of one man which has fulfilled itself richly and strikingly through the people of North Carolina—Frederick Koch."

Program Heading of The Carolina Playmakers—a Woodcut by Juljus J. Lankes

The Inky Cloak Is Touched With Crimson

Professor Koch Plays Hamlet

By Samuel Selden

ONCE, QUITE A WHILE AGO when Frederick Koch, Founder and Director of The Carolina Playmakers, was a high school boy in Peoria, Illinois, he saw the great Italian actor, Salvini the Younger, play Hamlet. The experience of observing his performance made a profound impression. It enkindled in young Frederick a keen, lifelong ambition to play some day the same strange and noble character as that portrayed by Salvini. The boy had to wait a good many years before he was to realize that ambition. As a student at Harvard, as a professor at the University of North Dakota, and later at the University of North Carolina, he gave numerous one-man performances of his favorite play; but it was not until a spring night in 1935 that he was to give a "regular" performance, one with fellow actors, in costume with scenery—a "sure-enough" show.

To commemorate the recent centenary of the birth of Edwin Booth, America's most famous man of the theatre, The Carolina Playmakers decided to produce his favorite acting piece, *Hamlet*. Remembering an ambition, and judging him to be the best fitted person in Chapel Hill, The Playmakers' staff urged Professor Koch to assume the leading role. He embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm; but as the time drew near to do the play, Mr. Koch was filled with misgivings concerning his ability to handle his rather terrifying task. He was beginning to realize that there is often a tremendous difference between an experience viewed in the soft glow of a day dream and the same experience seen in the cold light of actuality. Professor Koch's staff gave him encouragement, however, and his fears regarding his ability to play the long and intricate role of Hamlet proved groundless, for the play when produced was remarkably successful.

Hamlet was presented out-doors in The Playmakers' Forest Theatre at 8:30 on Saturday, May 25th. (A second performance was given the following Monday.) The rain, which had hampered so seriously the last

week of rehearsals and had necessitated a one-day postponement of the opening, suddenly stopped and provided a fair night. The air which stirred through the trees was fresh and cool. The stars were clear; but there was no moonlight. The quality of the darkness in the hollow of the woods where the stage was set was exactly right for the stir of walking ghosts, murderous plots, and brooding melancholy thoughts. A large audience was in attendance. Professor Koch, his fellow players, the musicians and technicians, released from the strain of their long rehearsals and the uncertainty of the weather, performed their parts with real enthusiasm. The result was highly gratifying.

The traditional conception of Hamlet is a strictly sombre one. Weighted with the consciousness of the evil conditions in his royal home, seeing forcibly his duty in respect to righting these conditions, but feeling, with sick pangs, his weakness in the presence of desperate action, he is generally depicted as a dark, tortured introvert into the shadows of whose soul never penetrates, even briefly, the light of day. Professor Koch, breaking from tradition, lifted somewhat his interpretation of Hamlet. Under the load of Hamlet's sombre melancholy he discovered traces of a fresh and youthful spirit, and gave value to these in his performance. He stressed the impish and whimsical qualities which throw into relief the doubt and bitterness in Hamlet's soul and by this means tried to give a keener edge to the Hamlet tragedy.

The result of this unorthodox interpretation was to raise, on the campus and in the state newspapers, a considerable body of conflicting criticism. Professor J. O. Bailey, reviewing the performance in *The Daily Tar Heel*, remarks: "Unusual dash was given to the play by Professor Koch's interpretation of Prince Hamlet. Hamlet's 'inky cloak' and 'customary suit of solemn black' was lined with crimson, and this fact is, I think, symbolic of both the Playmakers' and Professor Koch's interpretation of the play. Professor Koch acted his most difficult role with sensitivity, with self-scorn and *weltschmerz* in the soliloquies, with his personality pressing Claudius to fear and murder, and yet with a pleasing suggestion of youthful scholar-duellist from Wittenberg in his manner." While Professor Bailey says that he is inclined to doubt whether the romanticized interpretation fitted strictly in line with Shakespeare's original intention, he admits in effect that Professor Koch's performance possessed a freshness lacking in many of the so-called "traditional" interpretations. He is considerably intrigued by that touch of crimson in the inky cloak.

Miss Nell Battle Lewis, writing in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, objects to that touch of color. "Mr. Koch's performance of Hamlet," she says, "was accomplished but not profound. Perhaps the Director of The Carolina Playmakers is himself too volatile, too much of an extrovert to get wholly into the dark mood of the great introverted Dane. There was a new familiarity, almost an informality about his interpretation which was more satisfactory than the stilted, oratorical declamations of an earlier school of Shakespearean actors. But when he gave the great suicide soliloquy, for instance, 'To be or not to be,' you weren't convinced that this was a man in the throes of tremendous emotional conflict, and you were even less sure that this was Man at grips with Fate. As J. O. Bailey, reviewing the play for the University's student newspaper, suggests, the fact that, as worn by Mr. Koch, Hamlet's 'inky cloak' was lined with crimson was symbolic of the Koch interpretation. To my mind, the crimson lining was a mistake. There is no crimson lining to the character of Hamlet for me. Throughout it is dark, sombre, brooding, tortured and grand. One feels that the talents of Mr. Koch are better suited to the character of, say, Mercutio. But he was good—don't misunderstand me, very good, and Hamlet is one of the stage's hardest roles."

In contrast to Miss Lewis's opinion regarding the interpretation of the character of the Danish prince, it is interesting to see the view of an experienced psychologist. "I was early inoculated with the presentation of a melancholy Hamlet through Southern," says Professor Ernest R. Groves in a letter to Professor Koch. "Your interpretation gave me a new insight, and I feel you are right, if such an issue can be looked at from a psychiatric viewpoint. I am right, am I not, in assuming that the key to the tragedy of Hamlet is expressed in the words, 'The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, that ever I was born to set it right!' This is, of course, an emotional conflict, to use modern terminology. It cannot naturally lead to melancholy unless it becomes a chronic conflict and therefore must have time for a series of frustrations. I should imagine that Southern was off the track through the temptation to act a consistent mood, but this would not come early in such a situation. An extrovert would go after revenge and then afterward possibly have doubt. An introvert, as of course we all agree Hamlet was, would doubt first, and not until his doubt was settled to his own satisfaction would he seek revenge. Therefore, the turn of the play would be after Hamlet is convinced of the King's guilt through the King's reaction to the play that Hamlet fixed up. Up to this time, in accord

with an introvertive analysis, he would be wondering whether he was being misled by his own jealousy and emotional hostility to the King. Throughout this period Hamlet would be inconsistent, all the time influenced by the pressure from two directions which was making the conflict—suspicion of himself, suspicion of the King. In the latter part his conflict would be his fear that he might not be able to get his revenge. At no time would he be particularly melancholy. I think, therefore, that your portrayal is the sort of thing that the scientist would draw out of the drama."

Mary Dirnberger

The Staging of "Hamlet"

By Samuel Selden

IN THE CAROLINA PLAYMAKERS' outdoor production of *Hamlet*, an effort was made to highlight the naturally spectacular elements of the play, commonly slighted in indoor productions. The purpose of the Playmakers' presentation was not to destroy the sombre values and dull the sense of tragedy, but rather to sharpen these by means of contrasts—light against darkness, life against death. In order that greater variety of effect might be accomplished, a number of liberties were taken with tradition. The cast was enlarged to include, beside the regular principals and courtiers, groups of dancers and singers. Orchestral selections from the beautiful score composed by Sir George Henschel for *Hamlet* accompanied, interpreted, and reinforced the action of the players. A party of laughing revellers, weaving their way through a drunken dance, introduced the first scene depicting the rotten court; a choir of monks' voices chanted beyond the walls of a distant chapel during the interval when the king, alone with his conscience, knelt at prayer by his throne; a group of white-robed singing maidens, friends of Ophelia, intoned their grief beside her bier in the long procession to the grave; and so on.

The setting employed for the play was a large Medieval castle (ninety feet wide and twenty-two feet high) divided into three parts. The middle section with a curtained alcove at the rear (sometimes opened up to enlarge the main space) represented the general audience room, while the two wings extending beyond the massive stone towers at right and left suggested outer portions of the castle. Within and around this setting, Hamlet and the other characters, costumed in the Medieval style, moved from scene to scene. Most of the story unfolded in the main hall in the center. The two ghost scenes, the Osric scene, and one or two other scenes took place in front of the tower and wall (outside the castle) at the left. Ophelia was buried at the foot of the wall beyond the opposing tower at the right. The torchlight funeral procession appeared out of the woods at the far left, marched slowly across the foreground in front of the main stage, and halted by the grave at the right. Hamlet interviewed his mother in the alcove, picked out of the darkness by concealed lights, at the rear. The transitions from scene to scene were effected by changes of light motivated

with music. The action of the entire play was broken by only one intermission, at the close of Act III.

The production of *Hamlet* represented a considerable undertaking. It was made possible only by the cooperative effort of a number of friendly experts—Ora Mae Davis, who designed and made the handsome costumes; Harry Davis, George Pearson, and John Walker, who arranged the complicated lighting; Phoebe Barr, who staged the original dance and ensembles; Earl Slocum, who prepared and conducted the instrumental music; Grady Miller, who arranged the vocal music; and Wilbur Dorsett, who assisted with the scenery and assumed the Herculean task of stage-managing the production. The designing of the setting and the direction of the play were my own. In all, one hundred and sixteen persons (none of them merely "extras") took part in the performances of *Hamlet,* including a large staff of technicians, two complete glee clubs, and a symphony orchestra.

Poster Design by Mary Graves Reese

The Playmakers in "Hamlet"

By Phillips Russell

WHEN THE PLAYMAKERS produced *Hamlet* at The Forest Theatre on last Saturday and Monday nights, one might reasonably have expected to see the play done in a creditable fashion by amateurs and students working under difficulties. But what two large audiences saw was a production new and fresh in conception and carried out not only effectively but with beauty and distinction.

All these years *Hamlet* has been portrayed as not only a melancholy but a dark and funereal Dane. Frederick Koch and Samuel Selden gave us a production in which gaiety and delicacy were as prominent as heavy-footed woe. It was an original idea to have an amateur organization present the play to the accompaniment of music, both instrumental and vocal. This music might easily have been raggedly tacked on, but so cunningly was it woven into the whole fabric that one is tempted to wonder why the play is ever given without the aid of the divine art.

Koch's conception of Hamlet was as free of the weight of undue sombreness as the production itself. His was a youthful Dane, mocking, ironic, whimsical and intellectually agile, fiercely assailed by anguish, but finally mastering it. The grey-haired professor easily threw off the weight of his seventeen years as Director of The Playmakers and became a light-footed youth, dominating both friends and enemies by quickness of intellect and a tenacious will.

The direction, staging, and setting were masterfully carried out by Samuel Selden. His organization of more than a hundred persons, chiefly students, handled an immense task without a visible slip or any hint of an uncertain amateurishness.

No small part of the glory belongs to Ora Mae Davis, a genius in costuming who has often shown her ability to make important somethings out of virtual nothings. Her investiture for this play was full of subtle and tasteful colors. It was good for the eye to rest upon.

One thing particularly noticeable about this production was the fact that the acting, even in the minor roles, was on a uniformly high level. The hams, to which so many professional companies have often given the lesser parts, were not present. The student actors showed a sound training and

zealous spirit and they spoke clearly and distinctly—to whom all thanks and blessings.

Among the actors we especially admired Patricia MacMullan as Ophelia, Harry Davis as the ghost, Robert Nachtmann as Claudius, Louise McGuire as the Queen, Philip Parker as Polonius, and William Olsen and Kenneth Bartlett as the grave diggers. George McKie as the priest could have easily made many converts.

We particularly liked the dancing as arranged by Phoebe Barr, and the skillful sword duel between Koch and William Wang as arranged by Ralph Burgin.

Ophelia will never have again such attractive mourners as came from the Women's Glee Club, which made its first appearance in such a setting, and the men's voices and the music from the University Symphony Orchestra were wholly satisfying.

We thought The Playmakers were at their best in the production two years ago of *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* but in *Hamlet* they reached an even greater height.

Reprinted from *The Chapel Hill Weekly* May 31, 1935.

Elsinore in Battle Park

By Nell Battle Lewis

THE MOST PLEASING PERFORMANCE of *Hamlet* I ever saw was given by The Carolina Playmakers last week in The Forest Theatre in Battle Park here in Chapel Hill, with Professor Frederick H. Koch, Director of The Playmakers, in the title role. (I am going to write this review without once saying "the melancholy Dane," which will make it unique.) I have seen a subtler and more finished interpretation of the character of Hamlet—I saw Forbes Robertson in the part—and a performance acted by an abler supporting cast; but, taking the Playmakers' production by and large, it gave me more pleasure than any other I've seen.

This was the Playmakers' most ambitious production to date, and it was put on in commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Edwin Booth, who used to star as Hamlet. The version of the play presented was that of Booth's prompt book, with some modifications, shorter than the reading version by about a thousand lines. This comparative brevity made for compactness in plot. The continuous movement of the play—there was only one intermission, no divisions into acts and scenes—made it more enjoyable. "I hadn't realized before that *Hamlet* had such a tight plot," Paul Green said during the intermission.

A night performance of Shakespeare in The Playmakers' Forest Theatre is something which no good Tar Heel should miss, for it is one of the most agreeable forms of entertainment to be had in North Carolina. Before you reach The Forest Theatre, a natural amphitheatre surrounded by trees, you see, sparkling through the woods, electric lights strung around the open space on the hillside on which the audience sits. At the bottom of the slope the other night you saw in half-magical, mysterious shadows the battlements of that famed castle, Elsinore, very much as if it belonged in Battle Park—as, in fact, it does, since "that airy fabric," Elsinore, is the scene of a drama universal in application and appeal. The gray stone turreted castle was a fine set. Around it the whole play was acted. Sometimes the action took place in the central enclosure with the Danish throne in the rear; sometimes on one side, again on the other. The ghost walked past a door on the right, and the skull of poor Yorick was cast up beside Ophelia's grave

at the left. The night's soft shadows made dark wings where actors unseen might wait their cues among the trees.

There was witchery about this *Hamlet* in the open air, beneath whispering trees, and under the clear, bright stars of a perfect Carolina night in May. Above the audience was "this most excellent canopy, the air . . this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with gold fire," which to the Prince of Denmark in his deep depression seemed only "a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours." When Hamlet spoke of them to Guilderstern, one had only to look up to see those stars which age after age have been watching our "brief tragedy of flesh," of which this play is one of the noblest expressions.

Editor's Note: Reprinted from Miss Lewis' column "Incidentally" in the *Raleigh* (North Carolina) *News and Observer* for June 2, 1935.

"Proff" Koch

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